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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 003033

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JETER

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FRIENDS OF NIGERIA MEET ON INEC
PERFORMANCE

REF: ABUJA 2831

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons: 1.5 (B & D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Jeter hosted a second meeting with Chiefs of Mission of Germany, France, Canada, and the U.K. on October 15 to discuss upcoming Nigerian elections. This meeting concentrated on the flawed registration process, elections monitors and the need for an agreed upon standard by which to judge Nigeria's 2003 elections. The group agreed that it should meet with INEC before discussing appropriate responses to its perceived failings. The group also agreed to meet again following an expected meeting with INEC. End Summary.

¶12. (C) Ambassador Jeter invited the Chiefs of Mission of Germany, France, Canada and the U.K. to continue discussions (reftel) October 15. Canadian High Commissioner Howard Strauss, reflecting the broad consensus of the group, commented that the flawed registration process was the most pressing issue. He commented that this group needed to consider whether to support the political process directly through INEC or indirectly through NGOs. "Without our support," Strauss commented, "the process is doomed to failure." Acting British High Commissioner Charles Bird cautioned that the group should avoid two pitfalls: "we do not want to validate a flawed process and we do not want to be seen leading INEC." The group agreed that without more information from INEC, it would be impossible to assess the process. While all agreed on the flaws, it is still impossible to attribute the poor performance of INEC to either incompetence or malfeasance (or a combination of the two). The group agreed that Canadian High Commissioner Howard Strauss should pursue the promised meeting with INEC and report back.

¶13. (C) Discussion of monitors for Nigeria's elections took a back seat to the immediate registration issues. The group agreed that the President and INEC were "passing the buck" on invitations for elections monitors, each, according to Ambassador Jeter, claiming that the other bore primary responsibility for decisions on international monitors. Bird suggested "breaking the circle" by coordinating a list independently. DCM Andrews concurred, suggesting that a joint U.S.-U.K. list of proposed locations of U.S. and British monitors might assist the UNDP in developing its own priorities.

¶14. (C) Ambassador Jeter raised the issue of elections standards, asking if the INEC and other elections structures had sufficient capacity to come close to a "free-and-fair" election. Varying standards were suggested including the Carter Center report from the 1999 elections and the SADC standards, developed during the recent voting in Zimbabwe.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: All attendees at this meeting agreed that meeting with INEC was necessary before pursuing discussions on the viability of elections in 2003. The group continues to provide a useful forum for comparing and coordinating positions related to the upcoming 2003 election cycle. In collaboration with these like-minded countries, we will continue to use every opportunity to reinforce our message to Nigerian elections officials, individually and collectively, as the 2003 elections approach.
ANDREWS